

# Radio Hams Start Young, Stay Fascinated Forever

By MARILYN GWALTNEY

Allen County's approximately 500 amateur radio enthusiasts — "hams" — include the long-experienced and novices, and both males and females.

There are about 285,000 amateur radio operators in the United States, according to Charles Kronmiller, who refers to himself as "probably the oldest continually operating ham in Fort Wayne."

Kronmiller first became interested in radios back in 1912, when he noticed several huge antennas near the Pennsylvania Railroad. He went to the library and began reading up on radio, or the early "wireless" as it was then called. By the time he was in high school, he was broadcasting from the third floor of Central High School on equipment owned by his physics instructor.

"That equipment was so

loud," Kronmiller reminisced, "that with the window open you could hear it clear down on Calhoun Street!"

Radio has become much more sophisticated since then, and amateurs now can receive and transmit with relatively little interference. The legal power limit for amateur broadcasting is 1,000 watts.

According to the American Radio Relay League's official manual, the name "ham" was once applied in a derogatory way of early commercial operators to amateurs who kept hornning in on their frequencies. And, like the colonial Americans who adopted the derogatory "Yankee Doodle" with pride, amateurs began applying the term "ham" to themselves.

Kronmiller has one of the earliest call numbers, W9UC, or "Uncle Charlie" in code. Each letter of the alphabet has a specific and often exotic

name representing it, such as "Zanzibar," for Z.

There are five license categories for amateur radio. The novice (lowest category) must be able to send and receive five words per minute in code, as well as pass a simplified examination. The other categories (in ascending order of accomplishment) are technician, general, advanced, and extra, the latter requiring a proficiency of 20 words per minute and advanced theoretical knowledge of radio. Kronmiller is one of about 25 hams in Allen County holding the extra license.

For Kronmiller, a retired executive of General Electric Co., amateur radio occupies most of his time. "I especially enjoy experimenting with antennas," he said. He also repairs equipment, lectures at radio club meetings, and is licensed to give exams to aspiring hams.

For the past five years, Kronmiller has been an official observer for the American Radio Relay League. He sends cards giving advanced  
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**AIR VETERAN**—Charles Kronmiller of 7721 Aboite Center Road has been a "ham" radio operator for more than 50 years, probably longer than any of the county's other some 500 amateur radio enthusiasts.



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warning to amateurs operating outside their frequency range. Continued violation could result in a ticket from the Federal Communications Commission, and could mean loss of license.

Kronmiller pointed out that the use of profanity or discussing controversial subjects (such as Communism with an Iron Curtain ham) is also prohibited by the FCC.

Another ham in Fort Wayne is Bob Witte, president of the Fort Wayne Radio Club. The club, in existence since 1921, has about 75 members. "But we don't have nearly as many members as we should, considering the number of hams in Allen County," Witte observed.

Members meet once a month, every third Friday at the Red Cross Center. Several have been busy sending and receiving messages for relatives of people caught in the recent floods on the East Coast and in South Dakota.

Witte, an advanced licensee, became interested in radio in the early 1920s and has had the radio bug every since. He especially enjoys "ragchewing," a term applied to ordinary chats between hams.

Amateur radio is not limited to age, and Greg Dermer, a 17-year-old senior at Snider High School, is an enthusiast at the other end of the age scale.

Every Wednesday night, Greg, who holds a technician's license, is in charge of Net Control for the Fort Wayne area. A net is established for amateurs to call in with any messages they might have to be transmitted across the country or overseas. The message is given to the net control, who in turn transmits it to a ham in the vicinity of the message's destination.

Greg's call letters are WA9WUM, and he explained that Indiana is in the ninth call area in the United States, with the letter "W" assigned to all radio stations. That is why all amateurs in Fort Wayne have "W" and "9" in their calls. The last two or three letters are assigned at random by the FCC after licensing.

One of Greg's favorite "fun" activities of amateur radio is transmitter-hunting. A team of two hams hide somewhere with a transmitter and continuously broadcast until other amateurs, by following their signals, find them. The search can take anywhere from 20 minutes to several hours.

Women also are radio enthusiasts, as Irene Kennedy can testify, though she wishes more women who spend much of their time at home would develop the hobby, too.

Mrs. Kennedy, a ham for 9½ years, said that every since she was a child "radio has fascinated me." But she never knew about amateur radio until 15 years ago.

"I never thought I could pass the test to be a ham," Mrs. Kennedy, who holds the general license, declared. "I thought it would be too hard for a woman, since you also have to learn Morse code and know some theory."

But Mrs. Kennedy, who received help and encouragement from male amateurs, said, "It's the most exciting hobby there is. You never know whom or what you may meet over the air."